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ABSTRACT

This speech outlines the purposes to be served by increased professional and lay participation in decisionmaking at school and systemwide levels. The author suggests (1) a committee structure designed to facilitate increased participation by professional and lay personnel, and (2) some methods for involving professional and lay personnel at both the systemwide and school levels. (JF)

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INCREASING ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH INVOLVEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL AND LAY GROUPS

(O. P. Larson, Superintendent of Schools,
Lethbridge, Alberta.)

Much has been said about accountability in education during the past year or two. Considerable thought has also been given to ways and means of promoting increased accountability on the part of all personnel concerned.

Some of the reasons which seem to account for the increased concern shown for various forms of accountability in Alberta include the following:

- The rapid rate at which educational costs have increased during the past few years.
- The growing tendency on the part of senior governments and the public to look at educational enterprises in terms of cost effectiveness.
- The current financial limitations imposed on school systems by the provincial government.
- The dissatisfaction shown by some parents and members of the public in the results obtained, or coming from, certain educational programs.
- The trend to make school systems more responsive to the increasing demands for a voice in school system decision-making on the part of both professional and lay groups.

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Although the term "accountability" is too new in educational circles to have acquired a specific and definite meaning, there is little doubt about its general meaning and import for the schools. Stephen M. Barro[1] summarizes this very well in the following statement:

> " The basic idea it conveys is that school systems and schools, or, more precisely, the professional educators who operate them, should be held responsible for educational outcomes - for what children learn. If this can be done, it is maintained, favorable changes in professional performance will occur, and these will be reflected in higher academic achievement, improvement in pupil attitudes, and generally better educational results. This proposition - that higher quality education can be obtained by making the professionals responsible for their product - is what makes accountability an attractive idea and provides the starting point for all discussion of specific accountability systems and their uses in the schools."

School personnel, however, tend to fear, and perhaps rightly so, that accountability will become unduly concerned with a limited notion of responsibility, namely, holding the teacher responsible for improving the reading and mathematics scores of the pupils in his class. While this is a matter for which the teacher should be held at least partially responsible, matters related to the personal and humane outcomes of education are also important. Such outcomes are not quantifiable and, as a result, there is a danger that accountability approaches will give undue emphasis to the objective, quantitative, measurable side of learning, and that the humane and personal aspects will not receive the attention they should. Nevertheless, Myron Lieberman[2] contends that "... if the public schools do not develop acceptable criteria and procedures for accountability, they will stimulate the emergence of accountability through alternative school systems. To put it bluntly, if school systems do not begin to do a better job of relating school costs

to educational outcomes, they are likely to be faced with a growing demand for alternatives to public schools."

Stephen Barro[3] sets forth six approaches to higher quality education through accountability:

1. Use of improved, output-oriented management methods.

   The emphasis here is on accountability for effective use of all resources. It entails the determination of goals and objectives, methods of achieving the goals, and suitable evaluation procedures.

2. Decentralization and community control.

   Administrative decentralization, in which much of the decision-making authority is shifted from central administrators to local area administrators or individual school principals, can itself contribute to accountability. This shift of authority tends to make the schools more responsible to local professional views as well as to the views held by local lay personnel. Accountability under such conditions may be defined to include not only responsibility for achieving the objectives but also responsibility for selecting relevant goals and objectives in the first place.

3. Institutionalization of external evaluation or educational audits.

   This includes the use of external teams in evaluating the effectiveness of the educational programs carried forward in a school system. It assumes that public disclosure of the relative effectiveness of school programs will serve to make school personnel more accountable and responsible. It is possible the Department of Education may serve a useful purpose in establishing such teams through the regional offics now going into operation throughout the province.

4. Performance incentives for school personnel.

Barro states that "perhaps the most direct way to use an accountability system to stimulate improved performance is to relate rewards for educators to measures of effectiveness in advancing learning."[4] Professional organizations have tended to oppose such approaches largely because they fear that performance criteria might be applied subjectively, arbitrarily, or inequitably. Such opposition would probably disappear if a measurement system could be developed which would be widely recognized as objective and fair.

5. Performance incentive contracting.

Under such an arrangement a school district contracts with an outside agency to carry forward specific instructional activities leading to specified, measurable educational results. A number of projects along this line are now being carried forward on an experimental basis in the United States.

6. Alternative educational systems.

This proposal would allow competing publicly financed school systems to coexist and would permit parents to choose the schools for their children. This would force educational personnel to show a high degree of accountability to parents. The burden of providing adequate information and evaluating the school would rest not only upon individual parents but also upon school personnel.

For the remaining portion of this paper I should like to concentrate on two approaches to better quality education:

- Increasing accountability through professional and lay participation in decision-making at the system-wide level.

- Increasing accountability through professional and lay participation in decision-making at the school level.

It was felt that an elaboration of these two approaches would meet the task suggested to me for this conference. It was also felt that a description of the approaches would, to some extent, provide further comments on the first two approaches noted above by Stephen Barro.

Increasing Accountability Through Professional and Lay Participation in Decision-Making at the System-Wide Level

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Professional and lay personnel who are given an opportunity to play an active part in the decision-making process respecting the total operation of a school system will feel a good measure of accountability to all concerned and will hold a strong commitment to the decisions agreed upon. This has been the experience, particularly of professional personnel, in the Medicine Hat and Lethbridge public school systems during the past few years. Other systems that have had workable procedures in this regard have found that professional personnel in particular tend to show increased commitment and responsibility.

A description of the procedures that might be employed to promote increased commitment and accountability through professional and lay participation in the decision-making process are outlined below under the following headings:

- Purposes to be served.
- Committee structure required.
- Operational considerations.

Purposes to Be Served

Professional and lay participation in the decision-making process at the school system level will serve at least three valuable purposes:

- To facilitate the development of sound educational policies for later consideration and appropriate action by the Board of Trustees. Such policies usually relate to issues having application to the school system as a whole including matters concerning working conditions of the staff.
- To give careful thought to: (1) the selection and articulation of school system goals and objectives, (2) ways and means of attaining the objectives, and (3) continual evaluation of the usefulness of our educational programs and the extent to which our goals and objectives are being achieved.
- To develop, as a result of participation in the decision-making process, a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to the policies, decisions, goals and objectives agreed upon. In this way, it is hoped that school personnel will feel an increased sense of accountability to one another, to the Board of Trustees, and to the community as a whole.

Committee Structure Required

A committee structure designed to facilitate participation in policy development on the part of representatives of all groups concerned will be necessary. Such a structure will normally include such committees as the following:

- A coordinating or general policy committee.
- Principals' and vice-principals' group.
- Curriculum committees.
- Ad Hoc committees.
- Planning and Development Council.

For some clarification as to how and where these committees will operate in the school system and their responsibilities in relation to the roles of the board, the administration, and professional personnel generally, reference should be made to Figure 1. This is the type of committee structure established by a board policy statement, currently prevailing in the Lethbridge Public School System. The structure illustrated in this figure is, to a large degree, based upon ideas advanced by T. B. Greenfield et al[5] and by Davies and Brickell[6]. The following comments may serve to clarify the figure to some extent.

- The administration circle overlaps that of the board, and the professional personnel in the schools. This indicates that the administration is required to work closely with both the board and school personnel on many matters.
- The Board of Trustees is primarily responsible for establishing the broad purposes of education and adopting appropriate programs and policies to attain them.
- The Superintendent, as part of the administration, is required to act as an advisor to the board and as the chief executive officer of the school system.
- School personnel, as well as administrators, are primarily responsible for carrying out programs and policies adopted by the board. They are, however, also expected to play a part in developing suitable programs and policies for board consideration.
- All personnel affected by a policy, whether board members, administrators, or teachers should play a part in its development. Parents and students where applicable should also play a full part.

LETHBRIDGE SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 51

BOARD-ADMINISTRATOR-TEACHER RELATIONS

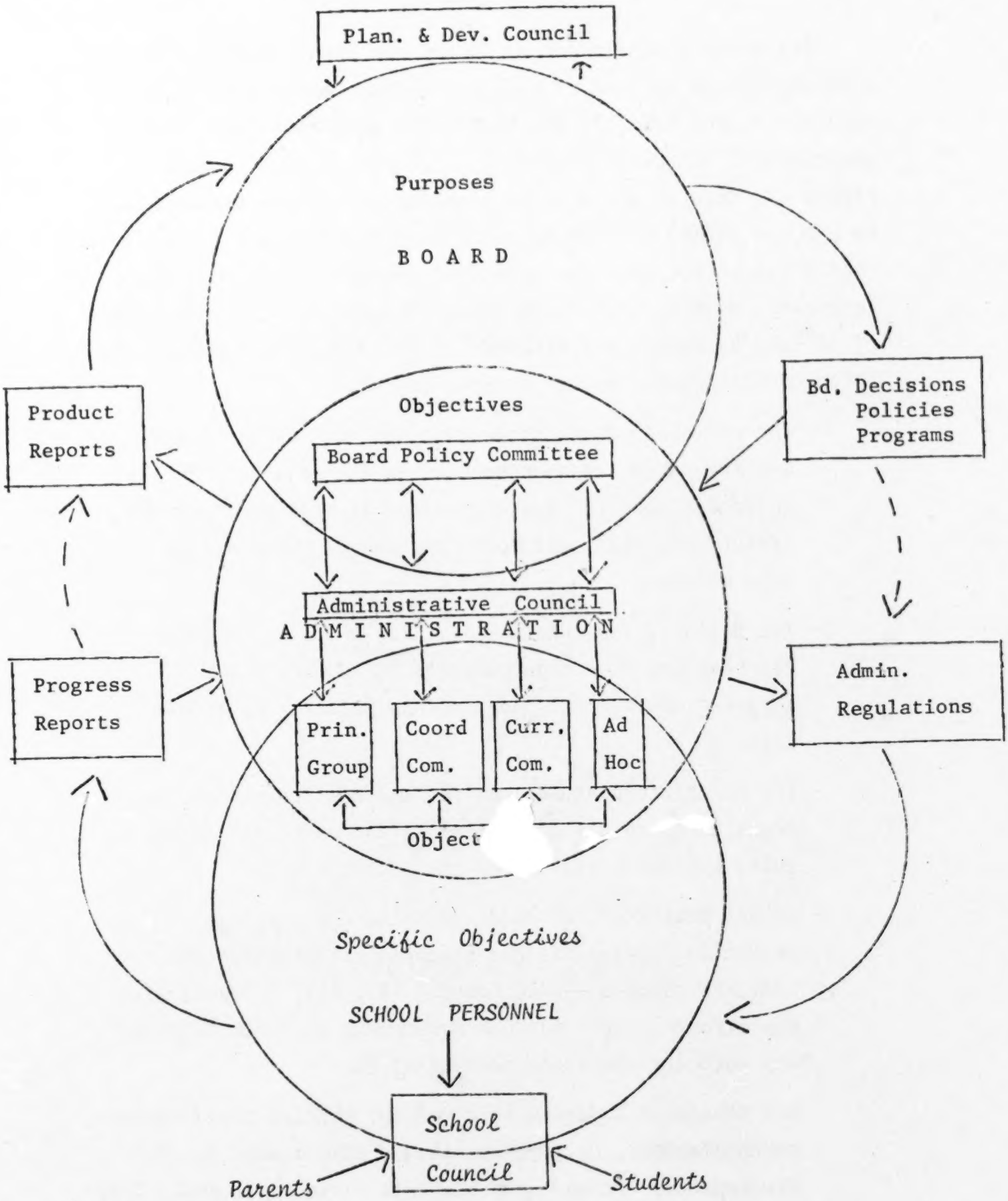

FIGURE 1

- The two main committees responsible for initially developing policies, programs, and courses of action are the coordinating (general policy) committee and the principals' group. Curriculum committees and ad hoc committees are concerned with special areas only. Their activities will normally come to the attention of the coordinating committee or the principals' group, particularly if they have application to teachers generally.
- The findings and recommendations of each of the committees are presented to the board policy committee (Board and Superintendent) for action through the administrative council. One of the responsibilities of the administrative council is to make certain that the agenda for regular board meetings is prepared in adequate detail with sufficient data included to enable the board to make sound decisions.
- The Planning and Development Council, consisting mainly of parents and students, operates as a long range planning committee and reports directly to the board.

The composition of the coordinating committee, the main policy developing committee for the school system, could vary, and probably should vary, from one school system to another. The important point to bear in mind is that all groups concerned should have representation on the committee. The chances of developing sound policies are much better when there is an input by representatives of the groups affected by the proposed policy or course of action.

In the Lethbridge Public School System, members of the committee include the following:

- Five representatives of the A.T.A. including:
    - Four teachers, one representing each division, appointed or elected by the A.T.A.
    - The President of the local A.T.A.

- Three principals (one elementary, one junior high, and one senior high) appointed or elected by the principals' group. They are, of course, also A.T.A. members.

- Four directors (Director of Curriculum, Director of Personnel, Director of Special Services, and the Director of Business Affairs, namely, the Secretary-Treasurer).

- The Superintendent of Schools.

- One or more board members who are free to attend and to participate as they may see fit.

It will be noted from the membership listed above that parents and students are not represented. Up until the present time in Lethbridge parents and students have a large membership on the Planning and Development Council which reports directly to the board. More will be said about this later. In the fall of 1971 consideration will be given to the possibility of including representatives of parents and students on the Coordinating Committee.

The Coordinating Committee was formally established in Lethbridge through the adoption by the board of a special policy setting forth its composition, purposes, and the procedures governing its operation. This was done only after full discussion with, and general approval by, A.T.A. representatives and the principals' group. It should be noted that the committee was established, and continues to remain, outside the provisions of the collective agreement. It was felt that by having the committee operate outside the provisions of the collective agreement, it would tend to better establish a climate of cooperation and mutual goodwill, so essential to effective operation.

Other committees, such as the principals' group, curriculum committees, and special Ad Hoc committees also play a part in initially developing policies for board consideration. Such policies, if they have application to all teachers in the system, will go to

the coordinating committee for examination and general approval before going to the board for consideration and appropriate action. If, on the other hand, the policies have application to a limited number of teachers, such as those in a specific subject area, the policies may go directly to the board for action.

The Planning and Development Council is primarily designed to provide lay participation on fundamental issues related to the operation of the school system. Its membership includes ten parents (one representing each of the five secondary schools and one representing each of five elementary schools on a rotational basis), five students (one representing each secondary school), one teacher appointed by the A.T.A., one principal appointed by the principals' group, and the Superintendent of Schools. The council reports directly to the board.

Operational Considerations

For some further clarification respecting the operation and usefulness of the committees, I should like to make reference to a number of operational procedures relating to them. First some comments concerning the coordinating committee.

1. This committee, as pointed out earlier, is the main policy developing committee for the school system. It concerns itself primarily with policies and programs applicable to the school system as a whole. It does not attempt to suggest policies for any one particular school. Policies developed and finally approved by the committee are submitted to the board, through the superintendent and the administrative council, for board consideration and action. The committee, therefore, is an advisory committee to the board.

2. The committee, as presently constituted, has representation from the groups that are normally affected by policies applicable to the school system as a whole. These groups include the primary teachers, the upper elementary teachers, junior and senior high teachers, the principals' and vice-principals' group, the directors in the central office, the Secretary-Treasurer, the Superintendent of Schools, and board members who may attend as they see fit. Up until the present time board members have not considered it necessary to attend the committee meetings as all policies must eventually come to the board for final consideration. A committee such as this permits the representatives of the groups that are particularly affected by a system-wide policy to participate fully in its development.

   The only groups that are not yet represented on this committee are the parents and students. At the present time they are rather extensively represented on the Planning and Development Council which, among other things, also provides an opportunity for the members to offer suggestions respecting the formulation of policies of interest to them. There is a possibility that parents and students may, in the near future, also have representation on the Coordinating Committee.

3. The chairman of the committee is the Superintendent, or his designate. In all school systems the superintendent of the district is expected to serve as the educational leader. Most school boards, if not all, also hold him accountable and responsible to the board for the total operation of the school system. In order that he may adequately fulfill such a role it seems advisable that

he should serve as the chairman of the district's main policy committee, or at least be a full member with every opportunity to exercise leadership. His leadership role on the committee should probably be comparable to that of the president of the university who, in Alberta, is required by legislation to serve as the chairman of the General Faculties Council, which is the main policy formulating body relating to the internal operation of the university. Unless the superintendent has an opportunity to exercise leadership on the coordinating committee, in a manner similar to that of the university president, his position may be undermined and his efforts to coordinate the total operation may be seriously hampered.

4. The committee was established through adoption of a suitable policy statement outside the provisions of the collective agreement between trustees and teachers. The policy statement was developed through consultation with A.T.A. representatives and the principals' group. It is felt the establishment of such a committee outside the collective agreement has served to develop and to maintain, at least to the present date, a spirit of mutual cooperation and goodwill so essential to the effective operation of the committee. There has been no attempt on the part of the members to divide into opposing camps as is frequently the case in negotiation proceedings.

5. The committee has adopted the consensus approach. No attempt is made to vote on issues as it is felt that this may tend to polarize the committee. Rather the problem under consideration is carefully studied, related literature

is searched if necessary, pros and cons are advanced, and after full discussion and input by all members in a spirit of mutual goodwill general agreement is reached. During the past three years that this committee has been in operation in Lethbridge this approach has worked effectively.

6. As a result of the input by representatives of all groups concerned, the soundness of the decisions arrived at and the policies developed are greatly enhanced. In view of this, if the committee has reached general agreement on a particular policy or course of action, the chances of the policy or course of action being approved and adopted by the board are also greatly enhanced. It is possible the board may have some changes to suggest and, if so, will refer these to the committee for further consideration. After one or two referrals, to and from the committee, the board in Lethbridge has always found it possible to adopt a policy generally agreed to by the Coordinating Committee.

7. Policies and courses of action agreed to by the Coordinating Committee and subsequently approved and adopted by the board are not in any way tied to the provisions of the collective agreement. In view of this such policies can be readily reviewed and changed by the Coordinating Committee and the board at any time. Ossification of the policy and the school system, which frequently results from the inclusion of clauses in the collective agreement is, therefore, avoided or greatly reduced.

8. The policy establishing the Coordinating Committee does not require that board members regularly attend committee meetings. Board members are free to attend as they may see fit. In Lethbridge, board members do not consider it necessary to attend committee meetings. They feel they will have ample opportunity to carefully consider policy ramifications when it comes to the board for appropriate action. To attend committee meetings they feel will take an undue amount of time and could result in unnecessary involvement in administrative matters.

9. Since policies and courses of action can be developed and agreed to by the committee whether board members are in attendance or not, it is evident that teachers can participate fully in the decision-making process with or without direct dialogue with board members. Teacher-board advisory committees that have been established in some areas are, therefore, unnecessary from the point of view of facilitating consultation and teacher participation in policy development procedures.

10. Since representatives of all groups concerned (except parents and students) have an opportunity to play a part in developing policies and programs of action, they tend to feel a high sense of commitment toward whatever policies and programs have been agreed upon. A sense of responsibility and accountability to one another also tends to be developed.

11. Bearing in mind the points as noted above, which support advisory committees having wide representation and establishment outside the collective agreement, the following comments respecting teacher-board advisory

committees that have an equal number of teachers and trustees seem in order:

- They do not provide for an input by representatives of all groups concerned. Teachers and board members only are involved. Principals, central office personnel and the superintendent are omitted, or at best, are included as advisors only.

- The exclusion of the superintendent, or his designate, may serve to undermine his position and thus make it much more difficult for the board to operate the school system in a smooth and effective manner. It will not only make it impossible for the superintendent to exercise the leadership that he should but will also make it impossible for the board to hold him accountable and responsible for the total operation of the school system.

- Teacher-board advisory committees established through the inclusion of a clause in the collective agreement may tend to foster a bargaining attitude on the part of many of the committee members. This in turn may generate a certain amount of antagonism and may cause the committee to divide into opposing camps with the result that nothing much will be accomplished.

- Since all groups concerned are not represented on an advisory committee with teachers and board members only, it is possible that the decisions taken and the policies proposed will not be as sound as those which are developed as a result of an input by all concerned. Because of this lack of full consultation, it is also probable that the board will not as readily approve and adopt such proposed policies.

- The establishment of teacher-board advisory committees through the inclusion of a clause in the collective agreement may tend to ossify the committee in the sense that it may be difficult to later change the structure of the committee through negotiations.
- Attendance of board members at committee meetings as required in teacher-board committees will mean:
  - That board members must be prepared to spend an undue amount of time in meetings while considering detailed development of policies. Many board members do not have such time.
  - That to participate meaningfully in discussions board members must acquaint themselves with the details of school operation and all educational implications. Board members are not expected to know such details. They have appointed their own administrators to look after such matters. If they are to become thoroughly acquainted with such matters and make decisions with respect to them, they (the board members) will tend to become administrators rather than policy makers.

With respect to the principals' group the following comments relating to its operation may be noted:

- This group is also an important policy developing body particularly in relation to administrative matters and procedures designed to promote effective operation of the schools.

- The chairman of the committee is the Superintendent of Schools or his designate.
- The consensus approach is used in a manner similar to that of the Coordinating Committee.
- Most of the policies and courses of action agreed upon are referred to the Coordinating Committee for suggested modification prior to submission to the board for final consideration and action.
- The principals' group serves as the main body for consultation purposes in the preparation of the annual budget.
- The group operates outside the provisions of the collective agreement. Policies developed and approved by the board may, therefore, be reviewed and altered at any time.

Insofar as curriculum and ad hoc committees are concerned, these operate in a manner similar to that of the principals' group. The chairman of the committees, however, is not the superintendent. This may be one of the directors or a person chosen by the committee. The superintendent only serves as the chairman of the two main policy committees of the school system - the Coordinating Committee and the Principals' Group.

With respect to the Planning and Development Council, the following comments may clarify the operational procedures:

- This council is similar in structure and purpose to the consultative school committees established by the Montreal Catholic School Commission.[7] It is designed to provide parents and students with

full opportunity to express their views respecting the operation of the school system.

- The council concerns itself primarily with long range goals of the schools and ways and means by which the educational program might better meet the needs, abilities and interests of students. It also plays a part in the development of policies that are of direct interest to parents and students such as the policy and program related to the drug situation in our schools.
- The council is primarily a lay group. Membership includes ten parents, five students, and three professional persons.
- The chairman of the council is a parent elected by the council. The agenda for each meeting is usually prepared by the chairman and the superintendent who is also a member.
- This council was recently established in Lethbridge by the board. It is now starting to explore what the long range goals of the school system should be. In this connection it is examining the two brochures recently produced by the Department of Education concerning the purposes and goals of elementary and secondary education. It is hoped that this may in due course stimulate teachers to give increased attention to the development of specific objectives and ways and means of evaluating the extent to which these are being realized. Reports and recommendations prepared by the council are submitted directly to the board for consideration and action as it may see fit.

Increasing Accountability Through Professional and Lay Participation in Decision-Making at the School Level

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Most school personnel are well acquainted with procedures at the school level which are designed to provide staff members with an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. Some of these include meetings of administrative personnel, department meetings, regular staff meetings, and meetings of ad hoc committees. Procedures designed to give not only staff members a voice in the operation of the school but also parents and students may not be so well known.

As was referred to earlier, the Montreal Catholic School Commission in 1965 took steps to experiment with consultative committees at the regional and system-wide level. Such committees were designed not only to give teachers and administrators a say in the operation of the school system but also parents. So also, at a later date, the Commission encouraged principals to promote and facilitate the establishment of school councils at the school level having parent representation as well as professional. In 1969 the Lethbridge Public School Board adopted a policy which encourages principals to establish school or faculty councils having representation as follows:

- Principal and vice-principal of the school concerned.
- Two or three department heads where applicable.
- Two or three teachers elected by the staff.
- Two or three students elected or appointed by the students' executive. In elementary schools the council may have no student representatives due to the immaturity of such students.
- Two or three parents elected by the parents of the school concerned.

Some operational considerations respecting such councils include the following:

1. The council concerns itself with matters such as:
   - Development of a school philosophy and long range goals consistent with those adopted by the board for the school system as a whole.
   - Development of policies and programs related to the internal operation of the school.
   - Consideration of programs, approaches or ways and means that might be adopted to better meet the needs, interests, and abilities of students.
   - Development of the school budget within the limits of the funds made available to the school.
2. The chairman of the council is usually the principal though this need not necessarily be the case. It could be someone designated by the principal or elected by the council.
3. All members have an opportunity to suggest items for the agenda in advance so that when the agenda comes out one or two days prior to the meeting, everyone will have had an opportunity to give prior consideration to all agenda items.
4. The council meets regularly or as often as found necessary.
5. The consensus approach is usually employed. That is to say, the pros and cons of all issues are carefully considered and after full discussion general agreement is reached.

6. The council makes it possible for representatives of all groups that are affected by a proposed policy or program to play a part in its development.

7. The policies and decisions generally agreed upon are considered as recommendations to the principal. Since the board and the superintendent hold the principal accountable and responsible for the total operation of the school, he is free to accept or reject the recommendations coming from the council. In nearly all cases, if a spirit of mutual goodwill and cooperation prevails during the discussions of the council, and if the principal has also participated fully in the proceedings, the principal will find that he will be able to accept the policies and decisions agreed upon.

8. Since all groups have had a part in the decision-making process, all members tend to feel a sense of commitment to the policies and decisions agreed upon. A greater sense of responsibility and accountability to one another generally develops. The principal will also not only feel that he is accountable and responsible to the board but also to the groups represented on the council.

Concluding Comments

In concluding this presentation may I say that an attempt has been made in this paper to set forth:

- Some comments concerning the meaning, and application, of accountability in education.
- The purposes to be served by increased participation of professional and lay groups in the decision-making process.

- A suggested committee structure designed to facilitate increased participation on the part of professional and lay personnel.
- Some operational considerations which suggest the committee structure, particularly as it relates to the main policy developing committee, would be more effective if it operated outside the provisions of a collective agreement.
- Suggestions for involving professional and lay personnel at both the system-wide level and school level.
- Some comments indicating that from experience it has been found that increased involvement and participation on the part of professional and lay groups in the decision-making process tends to promote, on the part of the personnel involved, an increased sense of responsibility and accountability to one another, to the board, to the students, and to the community as a whole.

The involvement of professional and lay groups along the lines as described in this paper, or in some other fashion, seem mandatory in the total operation of a school system. Education is becoming so complex today that it is impossible for the board or the superintendent to govern and operate a school system in isolation. Neither the board, nor the superintendent, can carry the total responsibility for all decisions without consultation, advice, and assistance from the professional staff, from the students, and from parents and other lay personnel.

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1. Stephen M. Barro, "An Approach to Developing Accountability Measures for the Public Schools", Phi Delta Kappan, December 1970, 196-201.

2. Myron Lieberman, "An Overview of Accountability", Phi Delta Kappan, December 1970, p. 194.

3. Barro, op. cit., p. 197-198.

4. Ibid., p. 197.

5. T. B. Greenfield et al. Developing School Systems. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1969.

6. Daniel R. Davies and Henry M. Brickell. How to Plan for and Conduct Your School Board Meetings. New London, Conn.,: Arthur C. Croft Publications, 1958.

7. Montreal Catholic School Commission. The School Consultative Committee. Montreal: The Bureau of Information, MC5C, 1967.